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ABSTRACT

Black Americans face a paradox concerning death: although their involvement with death is intense, their knowledge of death, per se, comprehension of death related behaviors, and exposure to available life extending alternatives are minimal. An interview based questionnaire was distributed to 1,010 adults in a predominantly black section of Memphis in order to investigate this paradox. The study was designed to disclose information concerning preferences, special practices, and attitudinal impressions of individuals and families regarding funeral service establishments, employees, and costs; funeral rituals; funeral home advertising practices; and manner and extent of preparation for death. Findings are analyzed in terms of variable respondent characteristics: birthplace and duration of residence, age, sex, race, occupation, education, religion, marital status, family size, size of household, and income. The findings indicate that blacks exhibit a high degree of acceptability toward death preparations yet a low degree of preparedness in understanding of, and commitment to a particular methodology with which plans might be carried out. (Author/MK)

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AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDES OF BLACK MEMPHIANS
TOWARD FUNERAL HOMES, THE FUNERAL RITUAL
AND PREPARATIONS FOR DEATH.

Findings and Analysis

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May-June, 1975

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modern man seems forced to abide with a truly perplexing paradox: though enshrouded and therefore continually influenced by the physical, psychological, sociological, economic and perhaps even the spiritual ramifications of an accelerating technology, man must nevertheless continue to confront and perhaps forever accept his inability to exclaim a genuine understanding of that perplexing phenomenon called death. To great extent, death has escaped the harnesses of the sciences, thus to many death is viewed as the last real frontier of the scientist. And because of this, death is frequently proclaimed the final true challenge facing man. Yet, for the layman and accomplished scientist alike, death remains a taboo subject. Thus today, most view death as an inevitable finale that either "accidentally" or "naturally" appends itself to human lives. Death is thus a "crisis" looked forward to, planned and prepared for in much the same rational manner that is employed to select an occupation, a mode of recreation, or for that matter, even a time for procreation.

This being then as it is, some perhaps live with a dual paradox, or in the least, some live with a death paradox that freights a dual load of perplexity. For example, due largely to their less fortunate economic status which ill affords them adequate medical care, legal protection, and other life favoring amenities, blacks in the United States have a higher level of mortality at all ages than do their white counterparts. Among blacks therefore, death is a considerably more prevalent social phenomenon. Moreover,

and ironically so, blacks possess only limited access to the educational and other available information that could provide them more understanding of death per se, or could provide them greater awareness of new life extending methodologies. The dual paradox of the black-American is thus: though more intense is his involvement with death, his knowledge of death, his comprehension of death related behavior and his exposure to available life extending alternatives are all minimal.

Purpose and Goals of the Present Study. This study was specifically designed to delve directly into the above stated dual paradox of the black-American, at least in part. In designing the study, our foremost goal was to disclose some useful descriptive information concerning the preferences, special practices and attitudinal impressions of individuals and families toward funeral service establishments, funeral establishment employees, funeral rituals, and other death related activities in a predominantly black thirty-three Census Tract area of Memphis, Tennessee. Another dimension explored pertained to the manner and the extent to which black-Americans prepare themselves for death. On the whole then, our objectives as stated should leave it apparent that the intent of the present study is to deal only with a narrow range of death related behavior and attitudes. Perhaps it need be specified also that the present study is at best, just a beginning inquiry; it is highly exploratory thus leading us only to tentative results and qualified conclusions. Yet, despite recognizing these obvious limitations at the onset, in carrying through the present study it is hoped that the more glaring implications of the above stated dual paradox of the black-American might be modestly explored.

Related Social Science Studies. The principal declaration that must be made concerning social science inquiries into the death-related behavior of black-

Americans is that they have virtually been left undone. Gerontologists and scholars working in the area of the Sociology of Death have not accumulated a meaningful body of literature which contains insightful theoretical statements or empirical reports wherein the subjects are racially differentiated. The more useful social science literature that does exist consists of but a few descriptive commentaries resulting from some impressionistic observations recorded by a few students of ghetto conditions. (e.g., Harrington, 1963; Moore, 1969) Their descriptions call attention to the obvious prevalence of death-related organizations, establishments and their operators or functionaries in black communities, and they point to enactments of elaborate, even gaudy, highly emotional funeral rituals. Overall though, they provide little useful commentary on the attitudes of black-Americans toward death or death-related activities, establishments and organizations.

For example, in his description of ghetto conditions in central Harlem, Harrington has noted that:

Death, for example plays a peculiar role in the life of this Negro ghetto. One first realizes this fact by walking the streets and gradually noticing the enormous number of funeral parlors. Undertakers are among some of the most respected members of the Negro middle class; Harlem is at least allowed to bury its own. For the Negro poor, death is often the only time when there is real luxury. Many of the Negro lodges and fraternal orders have death-benefit plans. Dying is a moment of style and status, at least in the impoverished world of the racial ghetto. (Harrington, 1963)

Though speaking specifically of Harlem, the relationship between death conditions and life conditions described by Harrington appears to have a certain applicability throughout a wide range of black-American communities in the United States. Nevertheless, this description fails to reveal any impressions of the ghetto dweller's attitudes toward death, toward the funeral establishment, nor toward the funeral ritual itself. As such, it

leaves much to the imagination.

Another noteworthy descriptive assertion was located in the social science literature: "Negro undertakers...are one of the few groups of entrepreneurs which has almost the same proportion of Negroes as has the general population..." (Myrdal, 1944) But, to be sure, equivalent proportions of undertakers do not bespeak an absence of segregation in the funeral industry of the United States. Hence, the same writer has also observed that "...corpses usually are segregated even more meticulously than live people." (Myrdal, 1944) No doubt, a close functional tie or organizational relationship exists between churches, lodges, benevolent societies, etc. and undertakers and funeral establishments; an associational complex which logically extends to imply that the total configuration of death activities engaged in by the black-American will doubtless be primarily experienced in a segregated setting.

Methodology. Perhaps, the principal methodological difficulty confronted for this study pertained to the selection of an appropriate study group. Who should constitute the study group? Precisely where are they located? And, what is the best method of locating and interviewing them? These questions make it evident that three basic methodological considerations had to be dealt with. First, which individuals should be included as respondents in the study? Second, how could the respondents best be systematically identified and interviewed? And, third, what research tool could be used to gather appropriate data from the respondents?

These issues were resolved by taking as data for this study, the series of response sets given to an interview-schedule questionnaire that was especially created for this study and then administered to a systematically drawn quota sample of the adult residents inhabiting the target area of

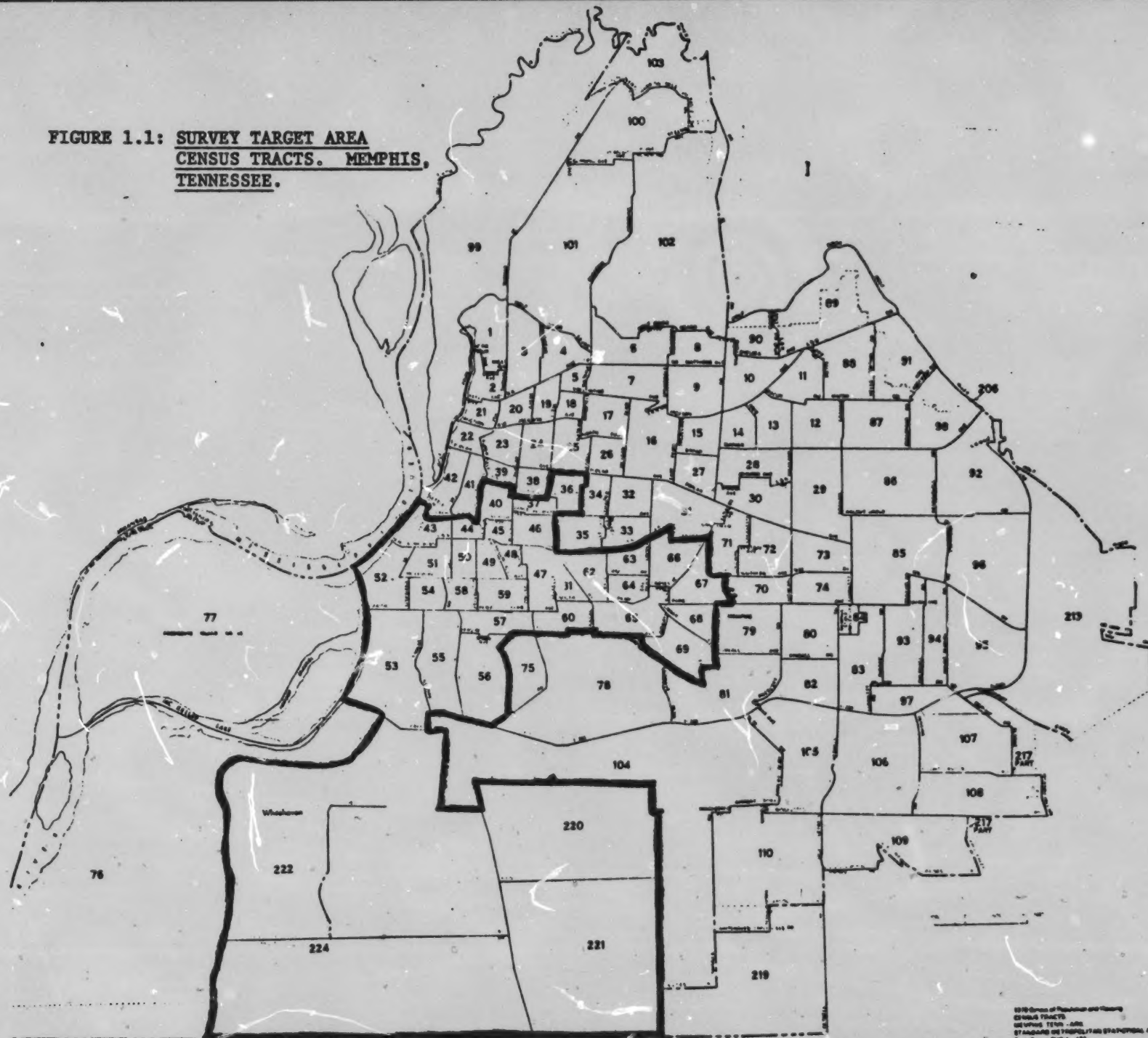
thirty-three predominantly black Census Tracts in Memphis, Tennessee. The bulk of the tracts sampled are located in the extreme western portion of the city. (See Figure 1.1) When superimposed upon the thirty-three Census Tracts, the employed sampling design projected the need for a total of 1043 interviews. The sampling frame was constructed on the basis of the 1970 total population count of each independent Census Tract and a one-half of one percent independent quota sample was extracted from each tract.

To collect the data, a dual-purpose data-collection instrument was designed. (See Appendix A) Adhering as close as was possible to the dictates of the elected quota sampling frame, the selection of households took place and the subsequent administration of the dual-use collection instrument provided a total of 1010 useful response sets for the study.

Inasmuch as the target population for this study was primarily black, a total of 27 black interviewers (Appendix B) were employed to collect all the data. A pre-administration training session was held for the interviewers in order to familiarize them with the purposes and paraphernalia of the study and, of course, to brief them on the procedures to be employed in the conduction of interviews and for overseeing the self-administration of the data-collection instrument when it could be used in this manner. At this time also, specific area (Census Tract) assignments were given along with time-tables and other guidelines imperative for the smooth transferal of all information from the point of the interview to the location of data processing.

Upon their completion, all questionnaires were forwarded to the primary-investigator who immediately coded all open-ended responses and supervised the transcription of the data onto a computer readable storage medium for analysis purposes. The SPSS package of statistical programs was used to

FIGURE 1.1: SURVEY TARGET AREA
CENSUS TRACTS. MEMPHIS,
TENNESSEE.



INSERT A - MEMPHIS AND VICINITY

1970 Census of Population and Housing
CENSUS TRACTS
MEMPHIS, TENN. - 400
STANDARD METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA
Final Report PHC(1)-137

facilitate the data analysis.

A Note on the Organization of this Report. Our statement of the purpose of the present report and its plan of organization can be stated by reference to its division into five chapters. Chapter I, the current chapter, provides a brief statement of the critical preliminary considerations that gave major guidance to the formulation of this study. In Chapter II, "Characteristics of Respondents," the major variables used to descriptively analyze the attitudinal and opinion items which form the later highlights of the study are straightforwardly presented. The materials presented simply describe the socio-economic characteristics of the individuals comprising our total quota-sample. This exercise was deemed essential in order to determine the comparability of our data to other data which define characteristics of the inhabitants of the target area and to crystallize our certitude that the respondents forming our study sample are indeed representative of the individuals residing in the target area. Any reader not interested in either of these considerations may wish to skip Chapter II, perhaps treating it as an appendix item, and go directly to the following chapters which are each layed out as independent discussions that center upon select topics. Chapter III, "The Funeral Home: Key Characteristics, Employees, and Practices", deals specifically with lay impressions of these items. One most interesting aspect of this chapter is the report on the attitudes of individuals toward the use of females in the role of Funeral Director. Chapter IV, "The Funeral Service", considers views of the purpose, elements and preferred locations of the funeral ritual. And Chapter V describes the nature and types of arrangements that our respondents are inclined to adopt in preparation for death and death-related estate transactions. Some chapters are given succinct summary; others are not. Our

judgements concerning the appropriateness of chapter summaries were dictated primarily by the nature of the information covered in each chapter and by the nature of any analysis and interpretations given. In some cases, it was judged important to summarize a chapters contents. At any rate, since some chapters are without summaries, and since this report does not contain a terminal summary, the reader is advised to inspect each independent chapter at its fullest without expectation of commentary that ties together the varied elements of the chapters.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Owing to the exploratory nature of our study, and to our goal of providing as rich a variety of descriptive information as is possible, it was early decided that a logical point of departure for our analysis would be to construct a socio-economic profile of the respondents that were located, contacted and interviewed for this study. To facilitate the development of the profile, information on a number of select background variables was collected on each of the 1010 respondents along with the other data of primary interest. For each individual interviewed, information was recorded designating the respondent's sex, race, religion, marital status, occupation, education level, family size, family income, place of birth and the length of his (or her) residence in Memphis, Tennessee. Once collected, this information was then processed to generate the socio-economic portrait which is presented in this section. The aggregate profile descriptions given are thus reflective of all those respondents constituting the systematically drawn sample which forms the analytical foundation of the present study.

Demographic Characteristics.

Birthplace and Duration of Residence. Nearly six of every ten respondents interviewed, or 57.7 percent of the individuals comprising our sample were born in Memphis, Tennessee. Non-native Memphians constitute 37.9 percent of the sample. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, or 72.8 percent have resided in the city of Memphis for 21 years or more. 275, or 27.2 percent of the respondents have shorter residence histories, but even the

TABLE 2.1: BIRTHPLACE AND DURATION OF RESIDENCE.

DURATION OF RESIDENCE	BIRTHPLACE				NO RESPONSE
	MEMPHIS	%	OTHER	%	
5 years or less	8	1.4	41	10.7	2
6 - 10 years	13	2.2	28	7.3	4
11 - 20 years	76	13.0	93	24.3	10
21 - 30 years	208	35.7	114	29.8	8
31 - 40 years	133	22.8	52	13.6	4
41 - 50 years	90	15.4	26	6.8	4
50 yrs. or more	45	7.7	27	7.0	5
No response	10	1.7	2	.5	7
Totals	583	100.0	383	100.0	44

majority of these have resided in Memphis over 10 years. Less than 10 percent of those interviewed have a residence experience record of ten years or less.

A cross-examination of the birthplace of respondents with their length of residence in Memphis did not reveal a relationship of any marked significance. However, a mild pattern of some distinctness did surface to reveal that of those respondents who had lived in Memphis only 20 years or less, the majority were not native to Memphis. A little better than half of those with residence histories extending from 6 to 20 years were non-native; but 80.4 percent of those who have resided 5 years or less in Memphis are not native to the city. On balance, therefore, these data disclosed that Memphis's black community has experienced a moderate degree of in-migration but to large extent it is markedly stable. These data divulged also that the sampling procedures employed in this study were successful in gathering information from individuals that undoubtedly vary widely in their knowledge of the community and its death-related practices and establishments.

Age. A study of the age distribution of respondents revealed that about two-thirds of all respondents are under 45 years of age, and that 463, or 45.8 percent of all respondents are 35 years of age or less. The modal age category was 26-35 years of age, with a frequency of 240, thus representing 23.8 percent of the respondents. The median age for the 1010 respondents was about 34 years of age.

Sex. Examination of the data by sex of respondent showed that 666, or 65.9 percent of the 1010 respondents are female and that 339, or 33.6 percent are males. The sex of one-half of one percent or 5 of the respondents was not determined. The sex composition of the sample therefore is somewhat over-representative of females, but this was anticipated since the bulk of

TABLE 2.2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE.

AGE	N	PERCENT
Less than 18 yrs.	35	3.5
18 - 25 yrs.	188	18.6
26 - 35 yrs.	240	23.8
36 - 45 yrs.	210	20.8
46 - 55 yrs.	135	13.4
56 - 65 yrs.	109	10.8
Over 65 yrs.	75	7.4
Age not specified.	18	1.8
Total	1010	100.0

the data was gathered during normal working hours of the day, when presumably, many more males than females would be at work and consequently not as likely to be contacted as representatives of the households petitioned for this survey.

Race. 842 black-Americans (293 males and 547 females) are included in the study sample. 125 whites, 94 female and 30 male, were interviewed also. Other racial-ethnic groups represented are Orientals, 6; Hispanic, 3; and American-Indians, 6. The racial-ethnic characteristics of 28 or 2.8 percent of the respondents was not determined. Nearly three-fourths of all white respondents are also native Memphians whereas only 56.1 percent or 472 of the 842 blacks in the sample are native Memphians, thus indicating that the black population sampled has manifest a greater degree of in-migration to the area of the city that was sampled for this survey.

Occupation.

The most frequently tabulated occupation for the respondents was that of Service Worker; 17.8 percent of all respondents were registered in this category. The percentage of Service Workers among the black respondents (20.7 percent) was just slightly higher than for the total sample. The next most frequently tabulated occupation was that of Laborer: Not Construction which was associated with roughly one of ten respondents. Here again, among the black respondents included in the survey, a higher percentage (12.0 percent) fell into this category. The third most frequently mentioned occupation was that of Housewife, involving 104, or 10.3 percent of all respondents. In the case of Housewives though, a markedly smaller proportion of the black respondents lay claim to being housewives than did those in practically all other racial groups. Whereas only 9.1 percent of black respondents are housewives, 16 percent of the whites, two-thirds of the

TABLE 2.3: CROSS CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND SEX.

SEX	RACE					
	BLACK	%	WHITE & OTHER	%	RACE N.S.*	%
Male	293	29.0	35	3.5	11	1.1
Female	547	54.2	108	10.7	11	1.1
Sex not specified.	2	.2	1	.1	2	.2
Totals	842	83.4	144	14.3	24	2.4

* To be read Race not specified.

TABLE 2.4: OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY RACE.

OCCUPATION	RACE			
	BLACK	%	WHITE & OTHER	%
Sales and/or Distribution	54	6.4	15	10.4
Production	44	5.2	6	4.2
Government	56	6.7	19	13.2
Military	21	2.5	4	2.8
Professional	50	5.9	18	12.5
Technical	44	5.2	18	12.5
Laborer: Construction	31	3.7	9	6.2
Laborer: Not Construction	101	12.0	4	4.9
Service Worker	174	20.7	3	2.1
Housewife	77	9.1	27	18.8
Unemployed	60	7.1	7	4.9
Retired	41	4.9	5	3.5
Occupation not specified	89	10.6	6	4.2
Totals	842	100.0%	144	100.0%

Oriental and Hispanics, and 16.7 percent of the American-Indians interviewed were housewives.

Fourth in frequency of mention was Government employment involving 7.8 percent of all respondents. Employment in a professional occupation status was claimed by 7.1 percent of the respondents; in Sales and/or Distribution by 6.9 percent, in a Technical occupation by 6.2 percent; in Production by 5.0 percent; in Construction Labor by 4.1 percent, and Military status was claimed by 2.5 percent of the respondents. Among this latter group of occupations reviewed, black respondents were less likely than were white respondents to be employed in all these, except for in Production and in the Military.

69, or 6.8 percent of the respondents in the sample were unemployed. Another 48, or 4.8 percent were retired and 100 respondents failed to indicate their occupational status.

Education.

Information on the education level of all respondents was not obtained due to the faulty construction of the initial data collection instrument. It was possible however, to modify the questionnaire-interview schedule in sufficient time to collect the requisite education data on 433, or 42.9 percent of the respondents.

Examination of the available data on respondent's education shows that an approximately normative distribution of educational levels should be influencing this study's response sets. To be sure, the largest proportion of the respondents are high school graduates. 174, or 17.2 percent of the total sample have experienced 12 years of formal education. Again, judging from the available information, the next largest educational grouping in the sample would be those having experienced 1 to 3 years of high school.

TABLE 2.5: EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND SEX.

EDUCATION	RACE			TOTALS ^a
	BLACK	WHITE & OTHER	NOT SPECIFIED	
8 YRS. OR LESS				
Male	22			22
Female	37	4	1	42
ME HIGH SCHOOL(1-3 YRS.)				
Male	21	2	1	24
Female	74	7	-	81
HIGH SCHOOL GRAD.(4 YRS.)				
Male	35	5	-	40
Female	93	41	-	134
COLLEGE (1-4 YRS.)				
Male	16	8	1	25
Female	22	38	-	60
GRADUATE TRAINING				
Male	1	1	-	2
Female	-	-	-	-
EDUCATION NOT SPECIFIED				
Male	198	19	9	226
Female	321	18	10	349

a. Totals exclude 5 respondents whose sex could not be determined.

TABLE 2.6: RELIGION OF RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND SEX

RELIGION	RACE			TOTALS ^a
	BLACK	WHITE & OTHER	NOT SPECIFIED	
Jewish				
Male	2	1	-	3
Female	-	2	-	2
Catholic				
Male	10	5	2	17
Female	14	10	-	24
Baptist				
Male	173	7	6	186
Female	383	49	8	440
Methodist				
Male	56	11	1	68
Female	69	14	1	84
Church of Christ				
Male	8	6	1	15
Female	21	-	2	23
Seventh Day Adventist				
Male	3	-	-	-
Female	-	-	-	-
Other				
Male	6	1	-	7
Female	19	2	-	21
No Religion				
Male	28	4	-	32
Female	34	31	-	65
Religion Not Specified				
Male	7	-	1	8
Female	7	-	-	7

a. Totals exclude 5 respondents whose sex could not be determined.

Individuals with some college are next in proportionate representation followed by those with some elementary school experience and those with education levels in excess of college graduation. The latter group of course being the least represented.

Religion.

Respondents in the sample were reported more frequently to belong to protestant Baptist faiths than to any other religious affiliation, 62.2 percent. 557 or the 628 respondents that indicated their religion as Baptist are black. 152 respondents, or 15 percent of the sample is Methodist and 82.2 percent of these are black.

Reporting no religion were 9.7 percent, or 98 of the respondents. 42, or 4.2 percent of the respondents are Catholic. A total of 5 respondents are Jewish, and 2 of these are also black. Church of Christ members in the sample total 38. And three Seventh Day Adventists are included also.

For 28 respondents it was not possible to determine their exact religious affiliation although they did lay claim to some religion. And 16 respondents did not provide any response to the question on religion when confronted with the data collection instrument. Consequently, information on the religion of a total of 44 respondents is non-existent.

Familial Characteristics.

Marital Status. Somewhat better than one-half, 515, or 51.0 percent of all respondents are married; 277, or 27.4 percent are single. Another 80 respondents reported their marital status as divorced. A larger number though indicated their marital status as widowed; a significantly larger proportion of black respondents (10.6 percent) than white respondents (5.6 percent) fell into this category. And 26 persons choose the "other" category in order to designate their marital status. This latter category

TABLE 2.7: MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS.

MARITAL STATUS	N	PERCENT
Single	277	27.4
Married	515	51.0
Divorced	80	7.9
Widowed	101	10.0
Other	26	2.6
Not specified	11	1.1
Totals	1010	100.0

TABLE 2.8: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY FAMILY SIZE
AND SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD.

	FAMILY SIZE		SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD	
	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT
1 person	105	10.4	124	12.3
2 persons	144	14.3	169	16.7
3 persons	122	12.1	158	15.6
4 persons	170	16.8	198	19.6
5 persons	134	13.3	125	12.4
6 persons	131	13.0	102	10.1
7-8 persons	111	11.0	77	7.6
9 or more persons	74	7.3	37	3.7
Size not specified	19	1.9	20	2.0
Totals	1010	100.0	1010	100.0

would have been chosen by individuals who were legally separated, voluntarily living apart, deserted, etc. Only 11 individuals failed to indicate their marital status.

Family Size. The largest family size represented by any respondent is a rather sizeable 22 persons. However, the most frequently encountered family size involves only 4 persons; this is the modal size for the sample. In fact, better than half, or 53.6 percent of the respondents are associated with a family of procreation that totals 4 persons or fewer. 265, or 26.3 percent of the respondents claim a family of 5 or 6 persons, and 111, or 11 percent are associated with families including 9 or more persons.

Size of Household. The typical household sampled contained four or fewer persons. The most frequently occurring size of household is 4 persons. A total of 649 persons or 64.2 percent of the sample is representative of households of size four or fewer. 227 persons or 22.5 percent of the respondents recorded that 5 or 6 persons inhabit their homes. Another 114 or 11.3 percent claimed larger households.

Income.

As can be seen from the data in Table 2.9, a wide range of family income levels are represented. Clearly, close to three of every ten families are low-income families with an annual income of less than \$3,000. Another 18.9 percent of the households surveyed report an annual income of \$3,001.-\$5,000. And families with incomes in the range of \$5,001. - \$10,000. number roughly the same -- though some less -- as those in the lowest income category. However, a significant proportion of the families in the sample, 17.3 percent, have a medium to high income which is greater than \$10,000. annually yet less than \$20,000. And 24 of the families surveyed reported incomes in excess of \$20,000. but less than \$35,000.

TABLE 2.9: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY INCOME AND RACE.

ANNUAL INCOME	RACE					TOTALS %
	BLACK	%	WHITE & OTHER	%	NOT SPECIFIED	
Less than \$3,000.	276	32.8	13	9.0	7	296 29.3
\$3,001. - \$5,000.	177	21.0	10	6.9	4	191 18.9
\$5,001. - \$10,000.	223	26.5	46	31.9	6	275 27.2
\$10,001. - \$20,000.	109	12.9	61	42.4	5	175 17.3
\$20,001. - \$35,000.	12	1.4	12	8.3	-	24 2.4
Income not spec.	45	5.3	2	1.4	2	49 4.9
Totals	842	100.0	144	100.0	24	1010 100.0

Taking a bird's eye view of the income distribution manifested by the families surveyed, a bi-modal distribution is revealed. The "income curve" such as it is, does not rise centrally only (as would be the case if a larger proportion of the families surveyed possessed mid-range incomes) but it is high at the lowest extreme and centrally. Of course, the seemingly excessive number of low-income families in the sample explains the additional rise of the curve at the lowest extreme, but this does not violate expectations though inasmuch as an exemplary distribution of family incomes within the predominantly black Census Tracts which formed the target area for this survey would no doubt reveal a noticeably high proportion of low-income families.

Summary.

The preceeding information on the select demographic, occupational, educational, religious and familial characteristics of respondents constitutes an overarching profile of our sample of residents of the 33 Census Tract area surveyed for this study. In the chapters which follow, these data are selectively employed in our analysis of responses to survey questions and other methods of inquiry used to explore attitudes toward the funeral home, the funeral ritual and preferences and trends in death preparations.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNERAL HOME: KEY CHARACTERISTICS, EMPLOYEES, AND PRACTICES

In this chapter, attention is turned to the locus of the funeral home. Information that is descriptive of the attitudes of the respondents toward various features of the funeral home is presented. More specifically, the initial focus of our discussion is upon the characteristics of funeral homes that respondents have indicated would be important, or have been important in their personal selection of an appropriate funeral home. Secondly, we inspect respondent's attitudes toward funeral home personnel; both lay impressions of the typical funeral home employee and opinions surrounding the proposed use of female funeral directors are described. The terminal components of this chapter focus upon respondents attitudes toward a select set of funeral home practices such as advertising, cremation, and costs. To begin with though, some space is allotted to a discussion of the concept "death experience;" a concept that has a special meaningfulness for this study in that it was employed to make distinct those respondents who have experienced, perhaps intense but yet meaningful prior contact with funeral homes and funeral home operations.

Death Experience.

Death in modern societies is to great extent a hidden phenomenon. Furthermore, the inner workings of death-related professions and institutions are generally little perused by the layman. Yet, as was mentioned at the onset, death establishments in predominantly black communities are usually not invisible, in fact, the institutions of death customarily stand out. The undertaker and his ancillary employees are quite visible

as a rule, and ordinarily, they are rather well known. Consequently, it was assumed for the purposes of this study, that most adults living in a predominantly black community would have internalized, in the least, a somewhat general culturally conditioned impression of funeral homes, funeral employees, and funeral home practices and policies. Nevertheless, it was not known just what aspects of urban culture were most apt to provide the more forceful influences lending shape to those impressions. Secular influences, religious orientations, the business ethics of undertakers, etc. were all candidate influences taken into consideration. Yet, when it came to declaring which one of these constitute the more important influence, no such declaration was made; there existed no sound basis upon which an assumption of this specific nature could be made.

On the other hand, it was assumed that if an individual had experienced an indirect encounter with death — say, by having lost a member of his immediate family; or, if a person had built into his life experience a past relationship of some significance with funeral establishments, then these respondents would no doubt reveal attitudes toward funeral establishments, their personnel and policies that have been conditioned by the interaction of their personal experiences and other cultural influences, rather than by ambiguous cultural influences alone. This assumption stemmed primarily from the implications of a good deal of social-science literature which emphasized that a variety of acute socio-psychological dynamics may be associated with confrontations with death.

For example, one implication disclosed is that confrontation with death generally involves people in some kind of bereavement behavior. (Vernon, 1970) This behavior quite frequently takes the form of 'classical' acute psychotic depression. Of course, the stress of bereavement is principally associated with the severance of established social ties. (Ander-

son, 1965) Occasionally though, the stress is so great and the reactions of individuals or families so intense that in some instances, casework intervention on the part of social workers, ministers or psychiatrists is an imperative for individual or family adjustment. (Wolfi, 1967)

In light of the above assumption, information was gathered to determine the extent and nature of each respondents past experience with death. Two key questions were asked: 1) Has anyone in your immediate family died?; and, 2) Have you ever had the responsibility for arranging a funeral? The first question was designed to render distinct those respondents who may have had their attitudes toward funeral homes and undertakers, etc. established in conjunction with a severe emotional experience. The second question permitted identification of respondents who at least have had a first hand encounter with many of the specific but variable elements of the funeral ritual, funeral establishments and their various practices.

The summary data in Table 3.1 renders it evident that 432, or 42.8 percent of the respondents interviewed had experienced a death in their immediate family. Most of the experiences in losing a family member occurred just a year or two ago, rather than over 5 years ago. The kinship relationship of the deceased family member to the respondent varies and is scarcely more likely to fall into any one category than another. These data further show that an inordinate number would fall into an "other" category given the selection of original kinship relationships specified in the data-collection instrument, but here too, it is thought that this pattern indicates variability of likely kinship relationships since spouses, grandparents and innumerable kinship ties with first, second, third, etc. cousins would be represented by the "other" category.

Close to one-third of the respondents have had the responsibility for

TABLE 3.1: FREQUENCY OF IMMEDIATE FAMILY DEATHS EXPERIENCED, OVER TIME,
AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE DECEASED FAMILY MEMBER TO THE
RESPONDENT.

"Has anyone in your immediate family died?"	Total	RELATIONSHIP OF DECEASED FAMILY MEMBER TO THE RESPONDENT						
		N.S.	BROTHER	SISTER	FATHER	MOTHER	CHILD	OTHER
YES	432							
...within the last year?	173	5	25	17	15	12	13	86
...within the last two years?	118	2	15	12	14	11	7	57
...within the last three years?	50		8	5	10	7	3	17
...within the last four years?	36		6	3	1	5		21
...within the last five years?	52	4	4	2	6	11	4	21
...longer than five years ago?	3		1		1	1		
NO	500	500						
NO RESPONSE	78	78						
Total	1010	589	59	39	47	47	27	202

TABLE 3.2: FREQUENCY OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE DECEASED TO THE RESPONDENT.

*Have you ever had the responsibility for arranging a funeral?		RELATIONSHIP TO RESPONDENT OF THE PERSON FOR WHOM THE FUNERAL WAS ARRANGED.						
		NOT S*	BROTHER	SISTER	FATHER	MOTHER	CHILD	OTHER
Yes	299	8	39	24	45	48	30	105
No	691	691						
No Response	20	20						
Total	1010	719	39	24	45	48	30	105

*Relationship not specified.

arranging someone's funeral. Again, the "other" category predominates in specifying the relationship to the respondent of the person for whom the funeral was arranged. No doubt here too, spouses and grandparents are most often the relations for whom this responsibility is assumed although more "distant" kinship relatives and even friends cannot be eliminated altogether. Insofar as the other relationship categories are concerned, fathers and mothers are the relatives for whom a respondent is most likely to have assumed the responsibility for funeral arrangements. The least likely category is "sister" but this is probably to be expected since most females marry and the marital or parental relationship seems to take precedence over the sibling relationship when the assumption of responsibilities for death rites are socially distributed generally.

Perhaps, experience with death has been most acute among those 219 respondents which were determined to have had not only the experience of having a member of their family die, but also the experience of arranging someone's funeral. Yet, due to the difficulties involved in structuring our data to take account of both these qualities, the 299 individuals who have had the experience of arranging a funeral will be treated as those possessing "death experience."

The Choice Factors.

Numerous selling strategies, advertising and pricing policies, special services and/or procedures have been provided and implemented by the director/managers or funeral homes in order to induce the inhabitants of their primary market areas to opt for their services rather than for the services of their competitors. Most of these alternatives though have not been established through the use of modern marketing or social science research capabilities but are at best, in many cases, simply extensions of traditional

practices, outdated policies, and standardized procedures that may very little respect (or exploit) the peculiar sensitivities of the consumers of the funeral market.

For instance, little can be assumed about the psychological impact of asking a person a question about cremation as an alternative means of disposal for his deceased family members, if little is known about his internalized impression or opinion about cremation per se. Perhaps the sale of funeral services may be positively or adversely affected by the presence or absence of an appropriate tact insofar as this topic is concerned. Correlatively, little use could be made of appropriate informal communication networks if it is not known first of all whether or not they are meaningful channels of communication for the person who is forced to make a choice about death related services, or, if it is not known how informal communication is ranked or rated by the funeral service customer say in relation to formal advertising especially during the rather stressful time of usual need.

To provide some answers to questions such as these, with the assistance of the respondents petitioned in this study, an attempt was made to construct a listing of those factors that the respondents of this study thought were most important to them in a past selection of an appropriate funeral home, or would be important to them in a future selection of a funeral home.

Each respondent was presented with a list of 16 items (See Table 3.3) and asked to rank order the seven most important items on the list; items that he felt certain would influence him in his choice of an appropriate funeral establishment, if he was ever called upon to arrange a funeral. The frequency and rank ordering of the items generated by the total 1010 respondents is presented in Table 3.3. The same information is presented

TABLE 3.3: FREQUENCY AND RANK ORDERING OF ITEMS AFFECTING RESPONDENTS CHOICES OF FUNERAL HOMES: FOR THE TOTAL SAMPLE, EXPERIENCED AND INEXPERIENCED RESPONDENTS, BY SEX, AND BY RACE.

CHOICE FACTORS	Total Sample		Death Experience ¹				Sex		Race			
	f	Rank	f	Rank	f	Rank	f	Rank	f	Rank	f	Rank
1. Personal Services available	682	1	205	2	471	1	232	1	448	1	547	2
2. Courtesies extended by the funeral home staff	680	2	211	1	462	2	230	2	447	2	560	1
3. Your own observations of funeral homes in the past	446	6	156	6	304	6	142	6	323	6	370	6
4. The guarantee of smooth running services	526	5	167	5	352	5	173	4	352	5	421	5
5. The reputation of the firm, the owner and/or staff.	541	4	170	4	364	4	167	5	371	3	436	4
6. Personal Acquaintance.	374	9	125	7	244	9	106	9	267	8	272	9
7. The location of the facility.	376	8	112	8	261	8	99	11	275	7	276	8
8. The modern conveniences of the facility.	298	11	87	10	210	11	100	10	198	11	246	11
9. Reasonable prices.	582	3	172	3	401	3	214	3	366	4	503	3
10. Appearance of the deceased at service attended.	324	10	110	9	212	10	116	8	205	10	261	10

TABLE 3.3: Continued

CHOICE FACTORS	Total Sample	Death Experience		Sex		Race		
	f Rank	f Rank	Inexperienced f Rank	Male f Rank	Female f Rank	Black f Rank	White & Other f Rank	
11. Recommendation of the Funeral home by friend or acquaintance.	193 12	55 12	138 13	68 13	125 12	149 13	37 11	
12. Affiliation of the Funeral Home with a church, lodge or union.	153 14	53 13	100 14	61 14	92 14	117 14	32 12	
13. Burial policy	385 7	85 11	295 7	124 7	259 9	338 7	31 13	
14. The first firm that happens to contact you.	52 16	7 16	43 16	21 16	31 16	47 16	1 17	
15. Advertising.	75 15	13 15	62 15	32 15	42 15	69 15	2 16	
16. The availability of ambulance services.	186 13	41 14	144 12	74 12	110 13	173 12	7 14	
17. Something other than the above: (Please list). ²	24 17	7 17	17 17	10 17	14 17	19 17	4 15	

1. Death Experience; is defined as having had the experience of arranging someone's funeral. (cf. the section on Death Experience above.)
2. Item No. 17 was chosen by 24 respondents as one of the top seven items on their list or rank-orderings of important "choice" factors. 22 of the 24 respondents did not list or describe the items they were making reference to in choosing Item No. 17; the remaining two respondents, of course, did. One respondent indicated that an important factor for him would be whether or not the funeral home was on the list of establishments given to him by the hospital where his relative presumably died. The other respondent indicated that "the frame of mind of the funeral home" would be important to her. This no doubt is a reference to the cosmology, philosophy, religiosity or ideology of the funeral establishment.

for "experienced" and "inexperienced" respondents, male and female interviewees, and for the total group of respondents distinguished on the basis of race.

As determined by an examination of the frequency with which all of the items were selected by the total group of respondents, the seven most important "choice" factors are 1) Personal services available; 2) Courtesies extended by the funeral home staff; 3) Reasonable prices; 4) the reputation of the firm, the owner and/or staff; 5) the guarantee of smooth running services; 6) the respondent's own observations of funeral homes in the past; and, 7) burial policy.

Essentially the same factors were most frequently endorsed as important by respondents who were "experienced" with funeral homes as by those who were "inexperienced." Among the foremost seven factors though, one noteworthy difference in the rankings did take place; the "experienced" respondents, on a proportionate basis, more frequently choose item #6 (Personal acquaintance) as a factor of importance. The more frequent choice of this factor by the "experienced" group caused its rank to be assigned as number 7 thus eliminating item #13 (Burial policy) which for this group received a considerably lower ranking.

When the sample was partitioned by sex so that the differential frequencies and rankings of the choice factors could be monitored according to the sex of respondents, some additional noteworthy distinctions were made evident. For example, female respondents, as a group, viewed "the reputation of the firm, the owner and/or staff" (item #5) as more important than either "reasonable prices" or "the guarantee of smooth running services." And "the location of the facility took precedence over having a "personal acquaintance" with the owner/operator or the "burial policy" of the firm.

A few differences in rankings by race are to be noted as well. The "burial policy" of a firm and "reasonable prices" are much more important factors to the group of black respondents than to those respondents representing other racial groups. It also bears note that generally speaking, being "personally acquainted" with the owner/manager of a funeral firm and the "location" of a funeral firm are not of the same importance to black respondents as they are to respondents in other ethno-racial categories.

Funeral Home Personnel.

Without question, it is common knowledge that funeral home personnel are variously described by the lay public. Characterizations of undertakers as "weird," "scary," or "frightening" are often articulated. Less common though are accurate empirical documents which present the nature and range of views of undertakers and funeral home personnel that are held by lay persons. And information on new attitudes as for example toward the employment of female funeral service directors is likewise scarce. To inquire directly into these areas, each respondent interviewed was asked a series of open-ended questions which were designed to solicit spontaneous characterizations of funeral home personnel and to lay bare also whatever configuration of attitudes respondents held concerning the use of females in funeral homes as directors, and about the potential of females to service the occupation of funeral director perhaps better than males.

When asked, "How would you describe the people who work in funeral homes?," most interviewees (60.6 percent) responded by articulating a positive description of the appearance, personality, the character or the skills of funeral home personnel. Other positive characteristics were mentioned as well but these were few and generally difficult to categorize. Another 23.4 percent of the respondents gave neutral descriptions of personnel and

these were for the most part easily categorized among the same basic dimensions. Only 16.0 percent, or 154 respondents clearly delivered negative impressions of funeral home personnel. (See Table 3.4)

Taken as indices of favorable assessments of the outward appearances of funeral home personnel were usually brief statements such as "neat," "respectable," "well-groomed," "good," or "okay." Positive personality descriptions were likewise usually brief, but a noticeably broader range of adjectives was employed by the sample group as a whole. Some examples of the favorable personality descriptions given are "courteous," "polite," "cordial," "friendly," "nice," "patient," "obliging," "eager to help," "co-operative" or "accomodating." Another cluster of frequently mentioned personality descriptions included the adjectives "sympathetic," "understanding," "interested" and "compassionate." Taken as positive references to the character of funeral home personnel were the expressions "mature," "settle-minded," "responsible," "reliable," "dependable," "dedicated," and "brave." In addition, use by respondents of the adjectives "honest," "fair," and "respectful" was taken as descriptive of the character of personnel associated with funeral establishments. Used as special positive references to the skills parlayed by funeral home workers were the terms "intelligent," "knowledgeable -- about their work," "organized," and "competent."

The variety of modifiers used to describe funeral home workers in a negative manner stand sharp in contrast to most of the terms used for favorable descriptions. Appearance descriptions such as "looney looking," "scared and stiff," "lousy" and "weird" were commonplace among the collected responses. Some examples of the adjectives frequently used to deliver negative personality descriptions are "cold," "dull," "hurried," "artificial,"

TABLE 3.4: FREQUENCY OF TYPES OF DESCRIPTIONS OF FUNERAL HOME WORKERS BY MAJOR DIMENSION CITED IN DESCRIPTION.

DESCRIPTION OF...	DESCRIPTION OF FUNERAL HOME WORKERS		
	POSITIVE	NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE
Appearance	65	37	48
Personality	368	94	50
Character	57	24	32
Skills	57	48	13
Other	2	9	2
Totals	549 (60.6%)	212 (23.4%)	145 (16.0%)

"not courteous," "inconsiderate," "wacky" and "off their rocker." Negative impressions of character were often expressed as "exploitative," "inhuman," "saddistic" and "unethical." Some negative skill referents used were "disgustingly witty," "disorganized," "incompetent," and "unprofessional."

But the neutral expressions used varied even more so than did both positive and negative statements, even though the latter were more numerous. A number of the neutral expressions were only classified with much difficulty since many expressions that were subsequently designated neutral received their designation only because they were compound expressions containing both positive and negative references. Statements such as "some funeral home workers are nice; others are only concerned with their jobs," or, "they are weird and inconsiderate, but they are well-groomed and conservatively dressed" are examples of the type of compound statement that made the initial analysis coding chore complex.

The results of our analysis of the various descriptions given of funeral home workers are tabulated in a summary presentation format in Table 3.4. On the whole, these data dispell two highlights: most individuals responded with positive descriptions, and most descriptions centered on positive personality features. Taken together, these patterns seem to warrant the generalization that most people have a favorable impression of funeral home workers and this favorable impression in turn has been imprinted or communicated by the especially warm, understanding and considerate personalities of funeral home workers.

Further assessment of these data in terms of the selected background characteristics of respondents revealed little additionally useful information. Some tendencies disclosed however are probably worth noting, though none represent statistically significant patterns. Black respondents had

a stronger tendency toward positive assessments of funeral home workers than did whites and others. Older respondents, especially those over age 65, delivered the highest proportion of neutral and positive assessments taken together; they tended least to be negative in their descriptions. Likewise, respondents who were "widowed" or "retired" tended to be consistently positive or neutral. Though in general, an examination of types of descriptions by religion showed no substantial differences, it was evident that those who claimed "no religion" gave a disproportionate number of negative descriptions. Perhaps the most interesting tendency in these data surfaced when the types of descriptions given were cross-tabulated with the education level of respondents. This manipulation revealed that as education increased, the tendency to deliver a negative description increased dramatically. Yet, for this relationship as well as others noted, it was not possible to demonstrate even a weak degree of statistical significance.

Women Directors.

Until the past few years, the vast majority of Americans felt that differential treatment of males and females was natural, that it was "the proper way of our people." Differentiation, the training for and lifetime enactment of different roles by males and females, the fact that women were generally inferior to men, and received unequal pay for oftentimes equal work, were all taken for granted. In recent years, these same social processes have come to be viewed as manifestations of callous discrimination. Of course, several factors can help explain this change in perspectives. First, Americans have become more humanistic — a result, probably, of increasing awareness of the costs of environmental pollution, racial discrimination, and war. Increasing attention has been given to barriers to human potential and expression; recognition of human sexual barriers is one.

Second, there has been an increasing stress on equality rather than on authority and hierarchical structure; a factor evident in student, civil rights and anti-war movements as well as in interpersonal relations. Third, many women who have entered the labor force in recent years have experienced occupational sexual discrimination firsthand for the first time. And finally, a series of technological and social changes (labor saving appliances for housework, institutionalization of education for both sexes, earlier age at marriage, child-bearing and nest-emptying, and so on) have probably rendered the mother/homemaker role alone, much less rewarding.

As traditional roles have lost their appeal, new roles have been sought. And clearly the quest of women for participation in all types of professional occupations has been witnessed. The role of funeral parlor director (or funeral home manager, or funeral director) is one occupational role that has traditionally been enacted by men. Though little questioned in the past, today many women view employment in funeral homes as practical and feasible for women much the same as they view the activities of any other profession. Consequently the exclusive male prerogative that at one time was aligned with the funeral service establishment has been lost.

But what is the view of the potential client of the funeral establishment? Be he male or she female, just what degree of acceptance of female funeral directors exists? We directed our attention to these questions in this survey by asking all respondents to respond to this statement: "In the past, most funeral directors have been men. Do you think women should be allowed to serve as funeral directors the same as men?"

Better than one-half (55.2 percent) of those who responded to this

question said "yes," the other 44.8 percent said "no." Female interviewees contributed the bulk of the "yes" answers, but this was due more to the fact that females constituted roughly two-thirds of the individuals surveyed rather than to any marked difference between males and females in their tendency to respond favorably to the proposal of female funeral directors. (See Table 3.5)

However, significant differences in endorsement rates by race of respondent, age and marital status did surface. When race was assessed, it became immediately clear that black respondents differ substantially from whites and others in their positive acceptance of female funeral directors. Blacks are more likely to be accepting whereas whites are more inclined to say "no." Age differences among respondents show another interesting near linear relationship: generally speaking, as age increases, the tendency to respond favorably toward female funeral directors increases. Though the data presented do not demonstrate this relationship straightforwardly, it is demonstrated that the extreme rates of acceptance of female funeral directors and the extreme rates of rejection are to be found in the oldest and youngest age groups of respondents, respectively. And, differentiation of response patterns by marital status reveals that "divorced" respondents and those who are legally separated, deserted, etc. and are therefore categorized as "other" show substantially higher rates of acceptance than do those in all other marital status categories.

Distinction by religion, income and education, though they reveal a host of differences in the acceptance and rejection tendencies of respondents, they are not statistically meaningful patterned differences, thus they warrant little discussion. One interesting feature expressed by the education data though does bear notice and that is the fact that high school

TABLE 3.5: PERCENT ACCEPTING FEMALE FUNERAL DIRECTORS BY SEX, RACE, AGE, MARITAL STATUS, RELIGION, INCOME AND EDUCATION.

		SAMPLE PERCENT	FEMALE FUNERAL DIRECTORS?			
			YES		NO	
			N	%	N	%
SEX						
Male		33.8	180	53.9	154	46.1
Female		66.2	366	56.0	288	44.0
RACE						
Black		85.2	474	57.3	353	42.7
White & Other		14.8	60	41.7	84	58.3
AGE						
Less than 18 yrs.		3.6	15	42.9	20	57.1
18 - 25 yrs.		19.1	99	52.9	88	47.1
26 - 35 yrs.		24.4	131	55.0	107	45.0
36 - 45 yrs.		21.2	107	51.7	100	48.3
46 - 55 yrs.		13.7	81	60.4	53	39.6
56 - 65 yrs.		10.7	56	53.3	49	46.7
Over 65 yrs.		7.3	46	64.8	25	35.2
MARITAL STATUS						
Single		27.8	140	51.1	134	48.9
Married		51.8	278	54.4	232	45.5
Divorced		8.0	54	68.4	25	31.6
Widowed		9.8	54	55.7	43	44.3
Other		2.5	16	64.0	9	36.0
RELIGION						
Jewish		.4	3	75.0	1	25.0
Catholic		4.3	29	69.0	13	31.0
Baptist		62.7	324	52.8	290	47.2
Methodist		15.5	83	54.6	69	45.4
Church of Christ		3.9	20	52.6	18	47.4
Seventh Day Adventist			2	66.7	1	33.3
Other		2.9	23	82.1	5	17.9
No Religion		10.0	57	58.2	41	41.8
INCOME						
Less than \$3,000.		30.4	154	53.5	134	46.5
\$3,000. - \$5,000.		19.7	113	60.4	74	39.6
\$5,001. - \$10,000.		28.8	147	53.8	126	46.2
\$10,001. - \$20,000.		18.5	95	54.3	80	45.7
\$20,001. - \$35,000.		2.5	10	41.7	14	58.3
EDUCATION						
8 years or less		14.7	46	73.0	17	27.0
Some high school		24.7	54	50.9	52	49.1
High School graduate		40.2	68	39.3	105	60.7
1 - 4 yrs. college		20.0	45	52.3	41	47.7
Graduate Training		.5	2	100.0	-	-

graduates stand out in their tendency to reject the notion of female funeral directors. In contrast, all other education groups show that a majority view females in the role of funeral director in a positive vein.

A supportive rationale was provided for both the favorable and unfavorable positions toward female funeral directors by just better than one-half of those queried. Most of those who provided a justificatory rationale thought that women should be allowed to take on the occupational role in question. The great majority of those who did not failed to provide any justification for their position. These differential provisions of information are reflected in the distribution of response frequencies presented in Table 3.6.

On the whole, the positive reasons given by individuals either invoke the lone proviso that women are deserving of equal employment opportunities, or they assert an ethos supporting equal employment opportunities but qualify it to take account of the formal qualifications pre-requisite for the job and/or consider the physical demands that may be normatively placed upon a person by the occupation. Others reasoned, positively, that women deserve consideration for the typically male role of funeral director since they could bring to the role a wide variety of supportive assets which were generally described as special "feminine" personality features. The most frequent rationalizations provided in support of rejecting females as funeral directors simply stated too obvious -- its a man's job --, or spoke to a common stereotype such as "women lack the ability." Indeed, other reasons were provided, many of which were not clearly supportive nor non-supportive; many were condescending, contradictory, or non-sensical. They were accounted for nonetheless, as were all non-responses. (Again, see Table 3.6)

TABLE 3.6: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION: "WHY DO YOU FEEL WOMEN SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE FUNERAL DIRECTORS THE SAME AS MEN?"

	FREQUENCY	%
Positive Assertions.		
1. Women deserve an equal opportunity.	321	31.8
2. Women who are qualified deserve an equal opportunity.	64	6.3
3. If the occupation is not too strenuous, women should be considered the same as men.	6	.6
4. Women deserve an equal opportunity due to special assets that they would bring to the job.	56	5.5
Negative Assertions.		
5. The role of funeral director is unquestionably a male role; it is a man's job.	13	1.3
6. Women lack the ability to perform as funeral directors.	7	.7
Other	50	5.0
No Response	493	48.8
Totals	1010	100.0

In conjunction with respondent's considerations of females in the role of funeral director, another follow-up question was asked, "Do you think ladies would make better funeral directors than men?" More than three out of every four interviewees reacted to this question with an unqualified "no." (See Table 3.7) Thirteen individuals indicated that they did not know and 43 others provided no response. On the other hand, 180, or 17.8 percent of those interviewed reasoned that women would make better funeral directors than men. Most who took this stand provided some rather interesting views in support of their opinions when they were further prompted to elaborate.

Better qualifications, sound character, special personality characteristics and the possession of special skills by women were the most frequently cited attributes of women pointed to by those who took the position that women would make better funeral directors than men. The most frequent references to better qualifications were but vaguely stated. For example, many recorded that "women are just better qualified to direct funerals," or "women can naturally conduct services better," or "women are more knowledgeable." Exemplary of the most frequently mentioned character statements are such expressions as "women are more conscientious," "women are usually more dependable" and "women will usually work harder and more consistently than men." More plausible though was that variety of statements which addressed special personality characteristics and/or special skills. Frequent arguments were that "women are more concerned about families;" "women are naturally more empathetic;" "women better understand emotional problems in this time of need." "They are more considerate" and "women are usually more adaptable." Or, "women have more patience with people than do men." One respondent wrote in bold capital letters, "WOMEN KNOW HOW TO TALK TO

TABLE 3.7: "DO YOU THINK LADIES WOULD MAKE BETTER FUNERAL DIRECTORS THAN MEN?"

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Yes	180	17.8
No	774	76.6
Don't Know	13	1.3
No Response	43	4.3
Totals	1010	100.0

YOU IN THIS TIME OF NEED." Yet, several individuals focused more on skills instead of personality traits. "Where dressing is concerned," one said, "you can't beat a woman." Another stated that "women are experts when it comes to fixing facial appearances," obviously calling attention to the usual skill and creativity that women exercise in the art of cosmetology.

Advertising.

Mortuary advertising is perhaps the most sensitive necessity associated with the normal operations of a funeral establishment. For this reason, funeral home owner/managers characteristically use highly selective advertisement techniques designed to impact target audiences with messages of availability, sincerity, and services without eliciting feelings of bad taste on the part of potential clients. Informal modes of advertising (word-of-mouth, "grape-vine," or intra-primary organization communications) are usually highly respected owing to their potential for directness, and when complimentary, they are cherished for their unique value. Advertising in the news or broadcast media (such as in newspapers, over the radio, or on television) is conventionally indirect; cautiously imprinting on potential customers a record of service, an image of the mortuary facility and delivery of the firm's name and location. Little more is added due to the tender sensitivities of people in general toward the phenomenon of death, death-related activities and institutions. Considerable attention is also given to artwork, graphic design, the tone of words used and the placing and spacing of advertisements to avoid triggering any adverse receptivities.

Too often though, advertisements are developed and programatically diffused within market-area populations with little or no "lay" guidance. The attitudes of laymen toward funeral home advertisements have been virtually left unexplored. To erase our ignorance along this dimension, one

component of the present survey focused upon attitudes toward funeral home advertisements. Respondents were asked, "Do you think that funeral homes should publicly advertise their business?" To this question, most individuals gave an unequivocal "yes;" about one-third said "no;" 2 were uncertain; and 43 or 4.3 percent of the respondents gave no meaningful response. (See Table 3.8)

When asked why they did or did not think funeral homes should advertise, several answers were given. (These are summarized in Table 3.9) The statements selected represent our choice of a statement which was most descriptive of an alike cluster of reasons. For example, the first reason given for non-endorsement is that mortuary advertisements are repulsive. Many respondents recorded that funeral home advertisements "frighten;" "are in bad taste," are "not religious," or, "they are sickening." Taken together, all these statements suggest that funeral home advertisements, for some psychological, religious, or other reason, are repulsive. Hence, they were categorized similarly. The same basic coding technique underlies all other categories developed; our major goal in employing this procedure was to lay bare the dominant prevailing types of endorsements or objections and to assess their distribution throughout the sample population.

Taking a bird's-eye view of the distribution of respondents citing both reasons endorsing and rejecting funeral home advertising, it seems clear from these data, that most people see the business aspect of the mortuary first and foremost and would accept its advertising on that basis. Furthermore, the fact that a mortuary may, like any other business, be long established or relatively new, and may have unique facilities or special services, provides further justifications in the minds of most people for advertising. And that mortuaries vary in their pricing of services is fre-

TABLE 3.8: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS ENDORSING OR REJECTING FUNERAL HOME ADVERTISING.

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Should funeral homes publicly advertise their business?		
Yes	630	62.4
No	335	33.2
Don't Know	2	.2
No Response	43	4.3
Totals	1010	100.0

TABLE 3.9: REASONS GIVEN FOR NON-ENDORSEMENT AND ENDORSEMENT OF FUNERAL HOME ADVERTISING WITH FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS STATING EACH REASON.

	N	PERCENT
Reason for Non-endorsement		
1. "Funeral home advertisements are repulsive."	30	3.0
2. "Funeral home advertisements are just not necessary."	82	8.1
3. "Funeral services should sell themselves."	57	5.6
4. "Funeral home business is a sure thing; everyone dies."	57	5.6
5. "Advertishing is not necessary for an established funeral home."	19	1.9
6. Other: non-endorsement reason.	44	4.4
REASON for Endorsement		
1. "Acceptable only for a new mortuary."	16	1.6
2. "Advertising is necessary to increase or enhance business."	158	15.6
3. "Adv. necessary to inform the public about facilities and services."	133	13.2
4. "Adv. necessary to ifnorm about special services.(e.g.,insurance policies,etc.)"	7	.7
5. "Adv. necessary to inform about costs."	28	2.8
6. "Adv. necessary for public to determine who does 'good work'."	25	2.5
7. "Adv. is acceptable if appropriate in nature and in location."	4	.4
8. Other: endorsement reason.	110	10.9
No Response	240	23.8
Totals	1010	100.0

quently recognized, perhaps as an element of competition, but this too serves as justification for advertising in the opinion of many. Yet, only a few people appear sensitized to the etiquette of "proper" location and "proper" nature of mortuary advertisements. This insight suggests that there may be considerable social tolerance for creative, non-traditional, and even direct media appeals.

Perusal of response patterns toward funeral home advertising while taking the socio-economic characteristics of respondents into account showed little difference on the basis of the more suspect background features such as sex, race, religion, income and education. Yet, it is apparent that age is a determining factor. Older respondents, in general, are most accepting of funeral home advertisements whereas the younger respondent is not. In addition, the longer a person has lived in the city, the more apt he is to endorse mortuary advertising. This latter observation perhaps portrays that persons with rural backgrounds are accustomed to informal communiques about mortuaries and activities surrounding a noteworthy death, whereas the long time city dweller has been bombarded with mortuary business petitions, obituaries, and epitaphs throughout his life.

Cremation.

As a means of disposition for decedents, and as a more simplistic and less costly alternative to burial, cremation is slow but definite in becoming an increasingly popular option within the United States. Though generally less frequently employed in America than in European and Asian nations, Australia, and especially England where today cremation is the mode of disposal of approximately 45 percent of the dead, in some parts of the United States, the use of cremation is more widespread. "In 1960 almost half of the total number of cremations in this country -- 28,000 out of 59,000 --

2

took place in Pacific coast states. In California, one out of six decedents is cremated, and the proportion is higher in the big cities."

(Mitford, 1963)

Among black-Americans, cremation has not been a noticeably popular proceeding. Yet since cremation enjoys sanction by most of the majority religions (excepting Catholics and some branches of the Jewish faith) and since inurnment is generally less costly than is interment, over time, one would expect that the likelihood of blacks electing cremation over traditional burial would increase. Of course, the availability of crematory facilities and services in mortuaries servicing black communities will affect this trend, as at present, few mortuaries make this service available. In Memphis, no black operated funeral establishment offers crematory services to its clientele.

A crucial question then is 'Does a demand exist for crematory services in Memphis' predominantly black community? Are residents of the target area of this survey presently knowledgeable about and receptive to cremation and inurnment as alternatives? If they approve or disapprove, what are their reasons? In the course of the present survey, answers to these questions were sought.

Responding to the question, "Do you approve of cremating the remains of the deceased?", close to seven out of every ten respondents (68.5 percent) said "no." Only 27.2 percent said "yes;" and the other 4.3 percent gave no response. Examination of the patterns of approval and disapproval in accordance with the socio-economic characteristics of respondents showed several marked differences on the basis of sex, race, age and education. Women, both black and white, irregardless of religion, have a greater distaste for cremation than do males. In general, blacks differ from whites

-- whites manifest significantly higher rates of approval (See Table 3.10 and Table 3.11) even within the various religions. Taking religion into account, our data further showed a decreasing tendency toward acceptance as age increases¹ and just the opposite occurs when education is examined as the greater the education level of respondents, the greater the degree of approval. On the whole, the influence of religion was not as marked as that of education. Approval and disapproval patterns did vary by religion though, ranging from full acceptance by those of Jewish faith² to the minimum endorsement given cremation by the Baptists in the sample population.

Costs.

In honor of differential conceptions of the essential conventional funeral elements (which oftentimes varies the amount and kind of professional services and equipment employed in a funeral) and in honor of differential abilities to pay, funeral establishments negotiate contracts for their services within a broad range of prices. Pricing policies among funeral homes are not constant. A study recently published by the Federal Trade Commission, which reports on price data extracted from mortuaries within the Washington, D. C. metropolitan area in 1973, showed that the

1. That education and age should reveal contra-distinct tendencies is not wholly surprising. No doubt the variation noted by age of respondent is due as much to differences in education level alone as due to other factors that may be related to age. This is strongly suspected because education levels fall off dramatically for the older respondents in our sample thus exhibiting a relationship between age and education that is characteristic of the black-American population on the whole. Restricted educational opportunities during the early years of life, when most formal education is received, has left those blacks in older age cohorts markedly less educated than those in younger age cohorts.

2. Although our data-collection instrument left it impossible to determine which branch of the Jewish faith the Jewish respondents are affiliated with, their acceptance of cremation suggests they are affiliated with Reformed Judaism.

**TABLE 3.10: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS APPROVING
OR DISAPPROVING OF CREMATION BY RACE AND SEX.**

RACE AND SEX	APPROVE		DISAPPROVE		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
BLACK						
MALES	88	31.7	190	68.3		
FEMALES	119	22.5	410	77.5		
	207	(25.7)	600	(74.3)	807	(100.0)
WHITE & OTHER						
MALES	16	48.5	17	51.5		
FEMALES	44	42.7	59	57.3		
	60	(44.1)	76	(55.9)	136	(100.0)

TABLE 3.11: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS APPROVING OR DISAPPROVING OF CREMATION BY AGE, BY RELIGION, AND BY EDUCATION

BY EDUCATION					
	APPROVE		DISAPPROVE		Totals
	N	%	N	%	
AGE					
Less Than 18 yrs.	9	29.0	22	71.0	31
18 - 25 yrs.	65	35.7	117	64.3	182
26 - 35 yrs.	78	33.5	155	66.5	233
36 - 45 yrs.	59	29.4	142	70.6	201
46 - 55 yrs.	37	28.7	92	71.3	130
56 - 65 yrs.	16	15.1	90	84.9	106
Over 65 yrs.	8	11.6	51	88.4	69
RELIGION					
Jewish	2	100.0			2
Catholic	13	33.3	26	66.7	39
Baptist	145	24.0	459	76.0	604
Methodist	45	30.4	103	69.6	148
Church of Christ	13	36.1	22	61.1	36
Seventh Day Adventist	1	33.3	2	66.7	3
Other	10	35.7	18	64.3	28
No Religion	45	47.9	49	52.1	94
EDUCATION					
8 years or less	5	7.9	58	92.1	63
Some high school	30	28.6	75	71.4	105
High school graduate	56	32.9	114	67.1	170
1 - 4 years college	37	43.0	49	57.0	86
Graduate training	1	50.0	1	50.0	2

average price, in that city, for a "standard" funeral was \$1137. And the "least expensive" available funeral cost anywhere from \$210. to \$900.

Though considerable information on funeral home prices is available, or for the most part, it is easy to obtain, reliable information on the cost expectations held by the potential funeral service consumer is scarce if at all existent. Hence, to this end, a brief component of the present study was directed. All respondents were requested to record, in actual dollars, their estimate of the actual cost for both an adult funeral and a funeral for a child. In addition, each respondent was asked to note their selection of a dollar amount that they thought an adult's funeral should cost, and a dollar amount that they thought a child's funeral should cost. The consequent data was taken as an overall index of the distribution of cost expectations characterizing the target population.

Following the adjustment of a few extreme respondent estimates, the overall distribution of responses was crudely plotted in order to assess the major implications of the two distributions with respect to the average cost of a "standard" funeral as reported by the Federal Trade Commission study of Washington, D. C. mortuaries. (See Figure 3.1) The plot shows that the modal estimate of the actual cost of an adult funeral, as given by the respondents of this study, is somewhat less than, but reasonably close to the only empirical measure of average funeral costs that is presently available for a large predominantly black metropolitan community. However, when the distribution of estimates of what the dollar cost of a funeral should be, in the minds of respondents, is examined, the closeness of the modal estimate to the Federal Trade Commission average price is lost. In fact, the relative shape and geometric location of the curve indicates that most of the respondents providing estimates of funeral costs in excess of the F.T.C. average feel that a funeral should cost some dollar a-

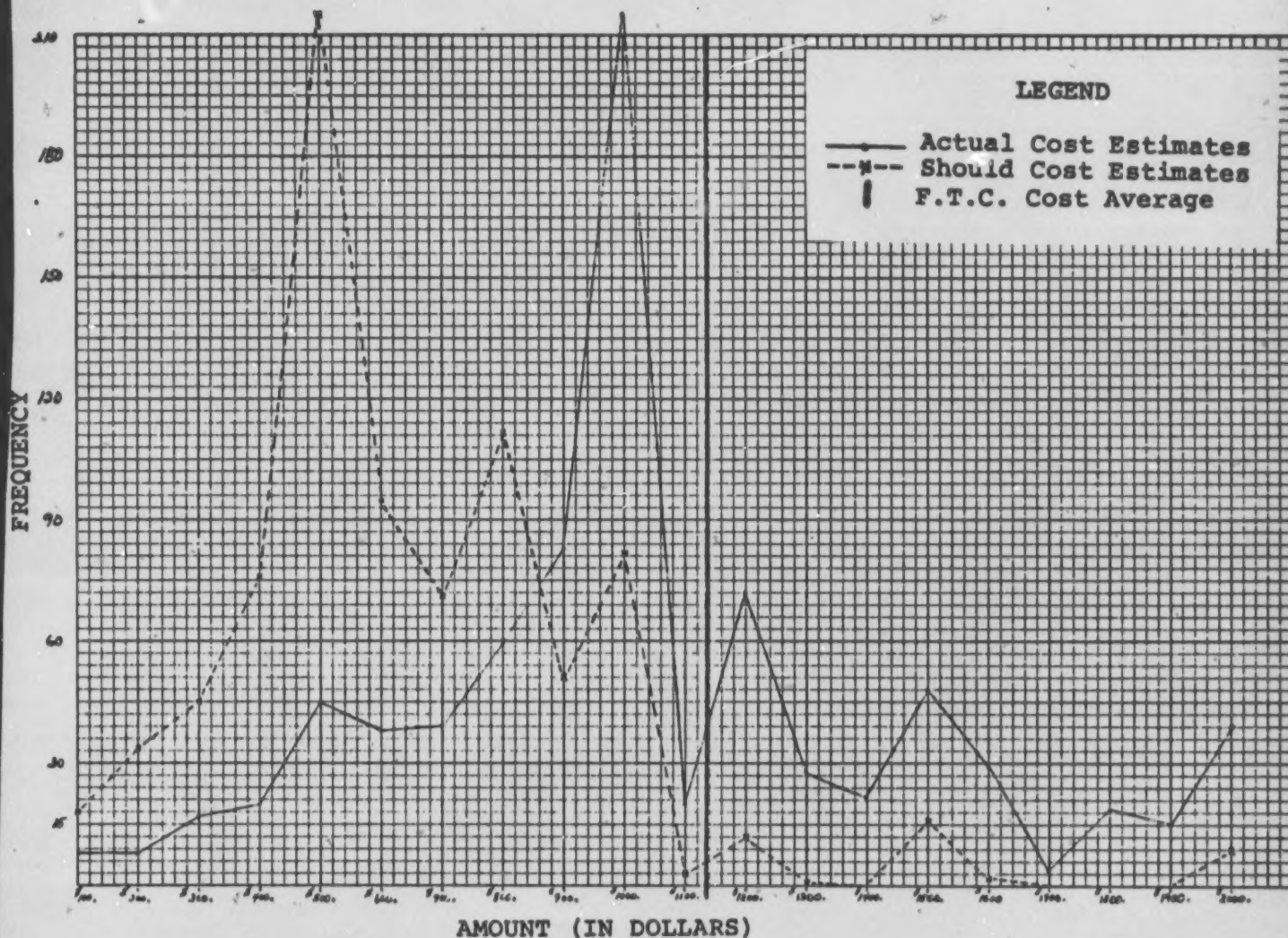


FIGURE 3.1: PLOT OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF "ACTUAL COST" ESTIMATES AND "SHOULD COST" ESTIMATES OF ADULT FUNERAL PRICES BY AMOUNT (IN DOLLARS) AND FREQUENCY.

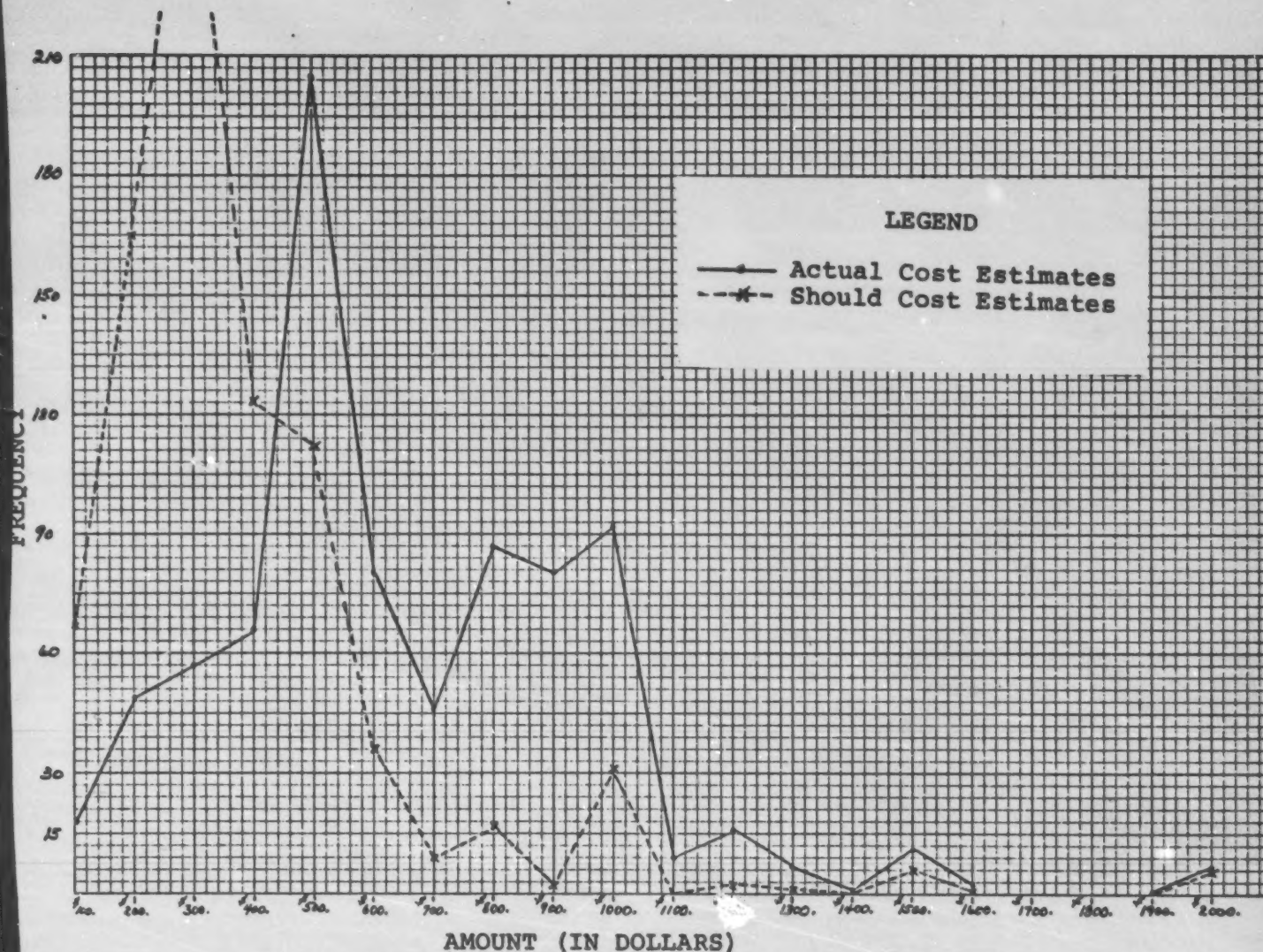


FIGURE 3.2: PLOT OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF "ACTUAL COST" ESTIMATES AND "SHOULD COST" ESTIMATES OF CHILDREN'S FUNERAL PRICES BY AMOUNT (IN DOLLARS) AND FREQUENCY.

mount substantially below this average. Most respondents would declare \$500. as the amount that an adult funeral should cost.

The plot of the bi-dimensional cost estimate data for children's funerals (Figure 3.2) reveals a pattern similar to that for adults. There are some substantial differences though, as the lower average dollar amount given and the bimodal character of the actual cost estimate curve unquestionably highlight. Furthermore, the compression of estimates of the amount that a funeral should cost around \$300. is striking; transferring of course, the bimodal curve of actual cost estimates into a unimodal one. The uniquely widespread agreement on \$300. as an appropriate cost amount for a child's funeral raises the question just what is operative within the target population, if anything, that has a "standardizing" influence and might explain the remarkably homogeneous set of estimates given by respondents.

Chapter Summary.

The present chapter has focused upon the funeral home, funeral home personnel and a variety of special funeral home features, practices or services as they are viewed by the respondents selected for this study. Those criteria most apt to be involved by respondents in making their selection of an appealing and appropriate funeral home have been described as ranked in order of importance by the interviewees petitioned during our survey. In addition, lay perceptions of funeral home personnel in general, and of the acceptability of women in the role of funeral service director, along with lay attitudes toward the advertising practices of funeral homes, toward cremation as a disposition alternative and respondents estimates of funeral costs have been assessed and descriptively elaborated. In the chapter to follow, attention will be turned toward the funeral ritual.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

A wide variety of social functions are served by the funeral ritual. Yet, the funeral's acknowledged functions vary, of course, from one religious or cultural group to the other. With its structure developed primarily under the close guidance of customs rooted deep in religious or philosophic beliefs, the funeral ritual is enacted — without question — to serve its seldom publicly stated avowed purpose.

In modern society, the purpose of the funeral ritual seems little discussed in the open. Moreover, the specifics of funeral arrangements and general proceedings are far from being standardized by custom. Even the location of the dead for viewing purposes and for the funeral rite itself are not now truly dictated by rigid cultural customs nor by religious law as is attested to by the growing tendency for Americans to hold funerals in the specialized chapels of funeral homes rather than in the denominational church sanctuary. Secular influences, along with countless expediciencies adopted by responsible survivors, these together have rendered varied the present-day funeral ritual.

Is there though, a common present-day perception of the purpose of a funeral that operates collectively in the minds of potential funeral service consumers? Are there any commonly preferred features of funeral rituals or other clear preferences in procedures or in the location of the funeral ritual? These constitute the basic theoretical questions that are pursued in this chapter.

Lay Perceptions of the Purpose of a Funeral Ritual. When the 1010 respondents of this study were asked, "What, in your mind, is the major purpose of a funeral?", the majority declared that the purpose was "to honor the deceased person" or "to honor the life of the deceased person." Many more rendered this same honorific declaration, albeit ambiguously by simply stating that the purpose was "so that people could pay their last respects (to the deceased)." Close to forty percent of the respondents viewed the purpose of the funeral ritual in this manner. (See Table 4.1)

Less than one-half the same number and percentage of respondents claimed that the purpose of the funeral ritual was "to bury the dead" or "to carry on a tradition (custom or convention)." And beyond these short phrases, little additional elaboration was given. Approximately 6.6 percent of the respondents (or, 67) viewed the funeral ritual as a social mechanism designed "to console the family of the deceased;" "to give the family the satisfaction of knowing that their loved ones were respected and appreciated." A few others saw the purpose as "forcing the family to get together," presumably, to take stock of the accomplishments of the deceased, to clear up any unfinished business surrounding the life of the deceased, or to console each other about the loss of a loved one. Only a small minority of the respondents saw the purpose of the ritual hinged to the dischargement of some unavoidable legal requirement, or as an event that is staged "to publicize the death of the deceased." Even more infrequent though were purposes interpreted in religious terms such as "to celebrate the home-going of the deceased." Thus, aside from the view which points to the purpose of the funeral as an event held in honor of the deceased person, there was little

TABLE 4.1: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONSES GIVEN TO THE QUESTION, "WHAT IN YOUR MIND, IS THE MAJOR PURPOSE OF A FUNERAL?"

PURPOSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1. To honor the deceased person.	401	39.7
2. To bury the dead.	169	16.7
3. To console the family of the deceased.	67	6.6
4. To carry on a tradition.	171	16.9
5. To publicize a death.	8	.8
6. Other.	66	6.5
7. No Response.	128	12.7
TOTAL	1010	100.0

unanimity among the views held by respondents.

Variation in Funeral Arrangements. Out of our interest in trying to determine whether or not a set of common expectations was tied to the various unit elements of the funeral ritual, respondents were asked to provide responses to two questions. The first asked, "In your opinion, what should today's funeral service include?" A follow-up probe associated with this same question inquired further ". . . should there be any difference between a service for a child and one for an adult?"

In answering the first question, 164 or 16.2 percent of the respondents simply said "everything." Approximately 42 percent attempted to list the items they thought were essential to include such as "a grave," "burial garments," "a short service," or other specific items. Most of the listings attempted could at best only constitute an incomplete listing of essential items, even for a most inexpensive highly abbreviated funeral package. Close to 40 percent of the respondents provided no answer to this question.

In reacting to the follow-up probe which searched for impressions of standardized expectations that centering upon differences between adults and children's funerals, most respondents failed to provide any useful response. Fewer than 40 percent of the respondents replied. And the information that was provided, when analyzed, revealed that better than one-half felt strongly that there should be no difference between the funeral arranged for the child as opposed to the adult. The phrase "all God's children are the same," as offered by one zealous respondent, seemed to summarize the general feeling portrayed by most respondents toward this issue. A few mentioned expected differences in cost, casket sizes, and in the length of the funeral service, but aside from

these items no other specifics of body preparation, the funeral ritual, or the service, nor the burial were mentioned.

The second question pertaining to variations in funeral arrangements asked: "Would you arrange a funeral differently for your mother or father than you would for your wife or husband?" 894 respondents, or 88.5 percent said "No." Only 96 or 9.5 percent said "Yes." The remaining 20 respondents gave no response. (See Table 4.2) Those who answered in the affirmative were then requested to "describe the difference" they would make between the two. A total of 90 respondents provided the information used to formulate the general impression that follows.

Differences in age, religious affiliation, personal requests and in whatever resources are made available for the sole purpose of the funeral would strongly suggest variable expressions in burial dress, in decorative flowers, and in decorative lighting during the time allotted for viewing the deceased's body, and in the nature of the songs used, if any, in creating a symbolic eulogy for the deceased. Other unique differences along these same dimensions were noted but the foregoing list exhausts the key factors mentioned by all those respondents who contributed a useful response.

Location. When asked, "Do you feel that funerals should be held in a church, or in an attractive chapel of a modern funeral home?", the 1010 subjects of this study, for the most part, said "either". 581 or 57.5 percent of the respondents gave "either" as their reply; 324 or 32.1 percent were dead set on the church; and 78 or 7.7 percent on the chapel. (See Table 4.3)

Among those who stated that their preference was the church, the largest number dogmatically stated that the church was preferred because

TABLE 4.2: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO WOULD ARRANGE A FUNERAL DIFFERENTLY FOR THEIR MOTHER (OR FATHER) THAN THEY WOULD FOR THEIR WIFE (OR HUSBAND).

ARRANGE DIFFERENTLY	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Yes	96	9.5
No	894	88.5
No Response	20	2.0
TOTAL	1010	100.0%

TABLE 4.3: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS PREFERING FUNERALS IN A CHURCH, A FUNERAL HOME CHAPEL OR EITHER.

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Church	324	32.1
Chapel	78	7.7
Either	581	57.5
No Response	27	2.7
TOTAL	1010	100.0%

it was the best place; "it's the only Christian place"; others argued that the church was "more honorable", or "more respectable". A small number of respondents (7) asserted that the deceased are entitled to "a church funeral;" and a larger number (39) even thought that any funeral "ought to be" or "should be held in a church". Indeed, to most preferring the church, a funeral is perceived as a "religious" event.

Some though, in a less dogmatic tone, just quietly spoke of a "preference" for the church, others highlighted the church's beauty. A fair number (17) pointed out that they thought a church funeral was "customary"; and an equal number viewed the church as "more convenient." Only a few (8) opted for the church out of any dislike for the funeral home chapel.

Those who preferred a funeral home chapel like those who preferred the church did so for a variety of reasons. Some attributed their preference to their belief that it was now customary to hold a funeral in a chapel. Others thought in practical terms allowing for those who did not enjoy membership in an established church or they thought of chapel use as a way to avoid moving the deceased. A few argued that holding a funeral in a church is a bad practice since "the ill feelings associated with a funeral will linger around." Most though who preferred the chapel apparently did so due to certain of its positive features; it was more convenient, less emotional, more private or just preferred.

Similarly, several reasons supported those endorsing "either" site; but two rationales predominated. The foremost was the declaration that "it does not matter," "it is a matter of opinion," "both locations are appropriate." The second most frequent reason given was that "it depends on the wish or the desires of the family of the deceased".

Mention of the choice being predicted upon a person's religion, church membership status, cost, or convenience and the other factors were minimal in contrast to the apparent full acceptance given either location and in comparison to the respect noted for the deceased family's prerogatives.

Examination of the socio-economic background characteristics of respondents in conjunction with the patterning of their location preferences turned up a few interesting relationships or lack of relationships. For example, contrary to our expectations, both differences in religious affiliation and differences in the sex of respondents were not good predictors of preferred locations. Nor was education. But racial distinctions, differences by age groups and income levels were observed. A higher proportion of the black respondents in the sample preferred the church (34.4 to 25.4), and a significantly higher proportion of the white respondents preferred the chapel (14.1 to 6.6). As the age of all respondents increased, the frequency of preferences for the church increased also. And finally, as income decreased, preference for the church increased. However, as income went up, it did not appear as if respondents less frequently opt for the church in favor of either setting, but indications are that preferences are more numerous for the chapel location.

Recent Changes in Opinions of Funeral Services. The final question that was posed to all respondents asked, "Has your opinion of funeral services changed in the past few years?" But surprisingly, close to three-fourths of all respondents said "No." (See Table 4.4) This suggested that most people hold views toward funerals that they have held for some time.

On the other side of the ledger, 23.2 percent of the interviewees

**TABLE 4.4: RESPONSE FREQUENCIES AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WITH A CHANGE
OF OPINION OF FUNERAL SERVICES IN THE PAST FEW YEARS.**

Change of Opinion?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	234	23.2
No	730	72.3
No Response	46	4.6
TOTAL	1010	100.0%

said "Yes." The reasons they then sighted for their transformed opinions were analyzed. The more broadly held reasons are presented in tabular form in Table 4.5. On the whole, the full inventory of reasons cited for opinion changes point only to minor transformations in the structure or unit elements of the funeral ritual. The observation of more elaborate, more colorful services seems to go hand in hand with, or better, is just as frequent as observation as, noting that the cost of funerals has risen. Some additional features of the conventional funeral have changed though, and these too were noted, such as the tendency today to hold shorter memorial services and to issue inconvenient schedules for funeral services.

According to our analysis of respondent characteristics, changes in general opinions are more likely to have occurred among older respondents who are black and they are least likely among respondents claiming to have no religion. It is not surprising that the older respondents have accumulated a series of mental pictures which constitute impressions of changes that they have witnessed over the years in funeral rituals. Yet, it is suprising that these respondents are mainly blacks. Perhaps the real reason for this distinction is vested deep in the unique socio-cultural histography of the black-American.

Chapter Summary. Our focus, in this chapter, has been the funeral service; the conventional memorial event. The perceptions of respondents of the purpose of this event, their expectations of what the funeral package should include, whether or not differentiation of the deceased by age, sex, or kinship relationship should be manifest differently in the funeral ritual and preferences for the loaction of the ritual have all been inquired into. And changes in opinions of funerals have been

TABLE 4.5: REASONS CITED FOR CHANGES OF OPINION OF FUNERAL SERVICES.

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1. The costs of funerals are higher.	60	5.9
2. Today's funeral services are shorter.	6	.6
3. The time of day/week that services are held has changed.	6	.6
4. Everything about funerals has changed: location, the time services are held, styles and costs.	26	2.6
5. Funerals today are more elaborate; more guady.	64	6.3
6. Other:	41	4.1
7. No Response.	807	79.9
TOTAL	1010	100.0%

examined also.

To summarize this chapter, we will briefly restate our major findings. Most people view the purpose of the funeral as an event held in honor of the deceased person; but a few attribute other functions to the ritual such as facilitating the dissolvment of a family's bereavement. Few respondents could provide an even "incomplete" listing of the elements that a funeral should include; and few had clear expectations of differences they would expect between an adult's funeral or a child's funeral, or one for their mother or father as opposed to their husband or wife. Furthermore, in general, acceptance for either the church or the chapel as the funeral location is great although those that stated a preference of the church rather than the chapel (or vice-versa), they too had their convincing reasons.

Finally, few people have new impressions of the funeral ritual. Only the black elderly who have no doubt witnessed a whole normative lifetime of changes, not only in the logistical features of the funeral such as its general location and scheduling, but also in its gaudyness, its elaborations and thus understandably in its cost.

In the chapter that follows, attention will be turned to the readiness or preparedness of respondents for death.

CHAPTER V

DEATH PREPARATIONS, CONSULTANTS AND BENEFICIARIES

The success of pre-need selling of funeral service packages depends upon a large number of factors. Perhaps paramount among these though is the willingness or propensity of individuals to pre-finance and/or to pre-arrange for funeral services in preparation for death. Indeed, the richness of a primary market area associated with any funeral service establishment is enhanced if a substantial number of its inhabitants are willing to enter into contractual agreements with the firm in order to guarantee themselves full and "proper" funeral and/or burial services and equipment. Furthermore, knowledge of the extent to which market area residents depend on a battery of experts with whom they might consult about the legal intricacies of "passing on" their real or personal property may too affect the assumed business potential inherent within a given market area. In addition, another asset can be knowledge of the usual type of agent employed for consultation about death-related matters or about the disposition of personal estates. A final factor of import, due to its relationship to the overall potential of a funeral establishments marketing area is whether or not the typical beneficiary will be able to discharge all federal, state or county tax assessments that may be levied against the usual inheritance.

In this chapter, for the residents of our 33 Census Tract target area, we describe their attitudes toward pre-financing and pre-arranging funerals, discuss their methods of passing on possessions from one generation to the next, and describe their willingness to seek the advisement of experts, as well as provide a portrait of the types of experts that they seek. Respondents assessments of the abilities of their beneficiaries are discussed also.

Pre-Financing and Pre-Arranging.

During the interview process, all respondents were asked "Do you feel it is appropriate to pre-finance or pre-arrange a funeral?" The total sample of respondents was almost evenly split by their replies. 419, or 41.5 percent said "yes" and 545 or 54.0 percent said "no." (See Table 5.1)

Since interviewers had been instructed to probe those who who answered "yes" to the initial question with the additional probe "why?," the reasons used by those who were favorable toward the pre-financing and pre-arranging of funeral services was provided. Reasons of course were varied, but some unanimity of reasoning was disclosed. The most often mentioned reason given is support of pre-financing and pre-arranging was the desire "to see to it that the family avoided as many problems as possible," or, "to offset any worries among survivors." Several saw pre-financing and pre-arrangement as a method to guarantee themselves a proper burial. "To avoid last minute problems of detail," and just "to be prepared" were other frequently mentioned reasons given.

**TABLE 5.1: APPROPRIATE TO PRE-FINANCE OR PRE-ARRANGE
A FUNERAL?**

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT*
Yes	419	41.5
No	545	54.0
No Response	46	4.6
Total	1010	100.0

* Percentage figures do not total 100 exactly due to rounding error.

Methods of Passing on Possessions.

When asked, "When you depart this life, how will your possessions be passed on?", the majority (Table 5.2) declared it would be "in a wisely planned manner." Most of the remaining respondents, some 35.8 percent of the total, indicated that they did not know how they would pass on their material possessions. A number indicated that they would leave the issue up to "chance," and a few others openly laid claim to a haphazard manner or gave no response.

The fact that a majority declared their intent to use a wisely planned manner is suggestive of a reasonably high rate of use of conventional professional guidance and professional advisement; both are clearly accepted and utilized by the target population. However, the observation that a sizeable proportion "don't know" how they will pass on their possessions tends to accent the business potential inherent within the target population. Many no doubt have not been exposed to the full range of wise alternatives and consequently they have not committed themselves to one method over another.

Expert Advice.

Due to our interest in trying to establish whether or not the subjects of this study represent a population that is favorable or unfavorable toward the advice of experts in normal estate and inheritance proceedings, all respondents were asked, "Do you believe, that because of increasingly severe tax rates, and the steadily deteriorating purchasing power of the dollar, that it is urgent for you to seek expert professional advice in order to make your personal property and earnings do the most

**TABLE 5.2: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION,
"HOW WILL YOUR POSSESSIONS BE PASSED ON?"**

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
In a Wisely Planned Manner	520	51.5
In a Haphazard Manner	19	1.9
Left to Chance	85	8.4
Don't Know	362	35.8
No Response	24	2.4
Total	1010	100.0

good for you while you live, and of course, to do the most good for your family and others after you are gone?"

The general pattern of responses to this question revealed that the target population was favorably more so than unfavorably disposed toward the utilization of professional expertise. 375, or 38.5 percent of the respondents said "yes" to this question, whereas 215, or 22.1 percent said "no." Of critical descriptive significance though was the volume of "don't know" responses to this query forming the modal response category. 385, or 39.5 percent expressed uncertainty about the value of professional expertise in the handling of their personal financial affairs.

Response differentials in accordance with the socio-economic characteristics of respondents were not observed across the board, as for example by sex, yet some distinctions were insightful. Differences by race were marked. (See Table 5.3) Black interviewees were significantly more favorable and less objectionable toward professional advice than were whites. However, no substantial difference in the proportion of "don't know" responses was indicated between the races. The variation in response patterns by age was erratic making straightforward interpretations difficult. Yet, the data does disclose that the younger respondent is most uncertain about this issue and the older respondent is more prone to positively reflect on professional advice. Marital status distinctions, while not on the whole significant, they made it apparent that those individuals who were widowed were most inclined to adopt the advisement of experts.

TABLE 5.3: DISPOSITIONS OF RESPONDENTS TOWARD THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL ADVICE, FOR THE TOTAL SAMPLE, BY RACE AND BY RELIGION.

	PROFESSIONAL ADVICE NEEDED?			TOTALS
	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	
Total Sample	375 (38.5)	215 (22.1)	385 (39.5)	975 (100.0)
Race				
Black	334 (41.2)	155 (19.1)	322 (39.7)	811 (100.0)
White & Other	36 (25.2)	54 (37.8)	53 (37.1)	143 (100.0)
Religion				
Jewish	1 (25.0)		3 (75.0)	4 (100.0)
Catholic	13 (31.0)	11 (26.2)	18 (42.9)	42 (100.0)
Baptist	244 (40.1)	111 (18.3)	253 (41.6)	608 (100.0)
Methodist	63 (44.1)	31 (21.7)	49 (34.3)	143 (100.0)
Church of Christ	10 (26.3)	10 (26.3)	18 (47.4)	38 (100.0)
Seventh Day Adventist	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	-	3 (100.0)
Other	18 (69.2)	5 (19.2)	3 (11.5)	26 (100.0)
No Religion	21 (21.4)	41 (41.8)	36 (36.7)	98 (100.0)

Religious differences were broad, ranging from the relatively high degree of acceptability recorded for those classed as possessing "other" religions at 69.2 percent, to a low of 21.4 percent among those claiming "no religion." A broad range of variation in uncertainty characterizes response patterns by religion as well.

The occupational, education and income characteristics of respondents were also somewhat insightful. For example, those who were retired, like those in the oldest age brackets, provided the highest proportion of favorable responses. Lower level occupational status carried with it a high degree of uncertainty; Service workers and Laborers provided the highest proportion of "don't know" responses. Surprisingly, though, in general, as education increased, the disposition to reject expert advice increased in incidence. And this same pattern was noted for increases in income, however, the tendency to reject expertise was coupled with an increasing tendency to accept assistance, with the degree of uncertainty about either course falling off in the main. Aside from the differential influences of religion, overall, old-age, retirement status and being widowed seem to form a complex of factors that tend to generate respect for the utilization of professional expertise in personal financial affairs; and all these features are associated with the terminal segment of the normal life cycle. In contrast, the main function of increases in education and income appear to be in diminishing uncertainty about the issue, but not necessarily in the direction of accepting professional advice though.

Types of Professional Agents Consulted.

To obtain a portrait of the types of professionals consulted by the inhabitants of the target area regarding the planning of their personal estates, a battery of professional types was presented to each respondent and each was requested to indicate which one if any they had consulted with in the past. The chief beneficiary of the respondent was included in the battery as well.

The consequent data presented in Table 5.4 is thus illustrative of the types of professional agents consulted and their relative importance to the community is indicated by the frequency and relative percentage of consultations engaged in with them by respondents. These data reveal that for the most part, "no one at all" is consulted. Yet, on the surface of things, it appears as if chief beneficiaries, life insurance agents and attorneys are regularly consulted by a reasonable proportion of the respondents. Partitioning this data by race, however, unmasks some additional noteworthy patterns. For example, it becomes immediately clear that black respondents are more prone not to consult anyone than are whites. And further contrasts revealed are, first, the greater reliance upon insurance agents by blacks than by whites and the relatively high measure of reliance on attorneys by whites in contrast to that rate for blacks.

One other revealing analysis was conducted. The relative frequency of consultations with the various professional agents was examined by income level of respondent. Disclosed was the

TABLE 5.4: FREQUENCY AND PERCENT* of THE TYPES OF PROFESSIONALS CONSULTED, FOR THE TOTAL SAMPLE AND BY RACE.

CONSULTED WITH...	TOTAL		BLACK		WHITE & OTHER	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Chief Beneficiary	227	23.2	178	21.9	48	33.6
Accountant	17	1.7	11	1.4	6	4.2
Attorney	129	12.8	95	11.7	32	22.4
Financial Planner	10	1.0	8	1.0	2	1.4
Life Insurance Agent	150	14.9	133	16.4	10	7.0
Tax Expert	15	1.5	9	1.1	5	3.5
Trust Officer	5	.5	2	.2	3	.3
Other	63	6.2	53	6.5	7	4.9
No One At All	361	35.7	323	39.8	30	21.0
Totals	977	100.0%	812	100.0%	143	100.0%

* The percentages reported are adjusted percentages based on the total number of respondents giving a valid response to this question. Missing data on the characteristic of race was ignored as well in the computation of relative frequencies.

pattern of an increase in consultations with chief beneficiaries, attorneys and life insurance agents as income increased along with a decrease in frequency of use of "others" and in the inclination to consult no one at all.

Beneficiaries' Abilities.

A final question put forth to all respondents concerned the ability of their beneficiaries to dispense with any likely tax liens that might be assessed against their personal and/or real property holdings in the event of their death. The question was, "To the best of your knowledge, will your beneficiary be financially able to satisfy all tax liens which might be imposed upon your estate in the event of your death?" As Table 5.5 illustrates, the most frequent response to this question was indicative of gross uncertainty; 454, or 45.0 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not know. Yet, 434, or 43.0 percent of the sample said "yes;" 88 or 8.7 percent said "no," and 34 failed to respond.

To this query, a substantially greater proportion of the white interviewees were able to respond with certainty; their stock response was "yes." Black respondents on the other hand, more frequently said "no," or they indicated that they were without this knowledge. Nonetheless, both groups overall registered a noticeably high degree of uncertainty with 48.3 percent of the black respondents and 35.7 percent of the white respondents answering that they did not know.

Variation among respondents by sex, age, marital status, length of residence in the city, and by family size was insignificant. There were some discontinuities by religious affili-

TABLE 5.5: CAN BENEFICIARY DISPOSE OF TAX LIENS?

	N	PERCENT
Yes	434	43.0
No	88	8.7
Don't Know	454	45.0
No Response	34	3.4
Totals	1010	100.0

ation though; however, when viewed whollistically, they would not admit easily to straightforward interpretation. Further, uncertainty as a response was most characteristic of individuals engaging in lower level occupations such as Service worker and Laborer. Education and family income differences though did appear to have some influence on the ability of chief beneficiaries for as family income and education both increased, the probability of "yes" responses among respondents increased and the likelihood of uncertainty decreased.

Summary.

This brief chapter has focused upon the general opinions of respondents toward death preparations, their preferred methods for "passing on" possessions, and their willingness to seek the professional advice of experts. Included also is an inventory of the types of professionals contacted by these individuals in their search for guidance concerning the dispositioning of their personal estates in the event of death. Provided also was a discussion of the extent to which respondents have knowledge of their beneficiaries abilities to function on their own behalf in the event of their sponsors death.

Generally speaking, the discussion provided emphasizes the prevalence of receptivity toward pre-financing and pre-arranging funerals, but most especially the former, and the preferred orientation of respondents toward the employment of "planned" transferals of property. Further highlighted was the generally greater degree of willingness on the part of respondents to petition for and rely upon expert judgements in the management

of their personal estates. And, on this score, it was emphasized that blacks manifest a greater willingness than did whites and that respondents characterized by features indicative of the "later years" of life had an even greater propensity to view the use of expertise as wise. The portrait of professional types petitioned of course emphasizes the differential important role of the life insurance agent, the attorney and the chief beneficiary in this community but even moreso it dispels the fact that a sizeable number had relied upon "no one." And finally, that uncertainty best characterizes the understanding most have of their chief beneficiary's abilities was underscored also. Taken together, the bulk of these features point to a generally high degree of acceptability toward death preparations yet a low degree of preparedness, understanding of and thus commitment to a particular methodology with which plans and preparations might be carried out.

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